



St. David of Wales

Patron Saint of St. David's B.N.S.



Little Is Known Of The Historical Dafydd

Little is known of the historical Dafydd, a Welsh man, who became known as St. David or Dewi Sant, as he was known in the Welsh language. He lived from about 520 to 601. Few details of St. David's life can be ascertained. Tradition has David's birth at St. Non's Bay (where some believe that St. Patrick was also born).

Dewi is said to have been of royal lineage. His father, Sant, was the son of Ceredig, who was prince of Ceredigion, a region in South-Wales (Wales). His mother, Non, was the daughter of a local chieftain. Legend has it that Non was also a niece of King Arthur. She appears to have worked as a nun in both Cornwall and Brecon after the death of Sant. The first biography was written near the end of the eleventh century, about 500 years after St. David's death, by Rhigyfarch, a son of the then Bishop of St. David's. It was supplemented by Geraldus Cambrensis around 1200.

Many Legends Surround David

Many legends surround David, one such being thirteen years before David was born. An angel appeared to Sant in a dream, telling him that one day he would have a son who would grow into a good and wise man. The angel instructed Sant to prepare gifts of a stag, a fish and honeycomb. The honeycomb symbolised his wisdom, the fish his simple life of bread and water and the stag his power to stamp out evil such as Pagan heresy. While David was being baptised the marvellous power that he possessed was first shown. The man Paulinus, who held the baby David, was blind and after David was dipped in the spring, the monk spiritised his own face with the same spring water and gradually his sight came back. David was educated in a monastery called Hen Fynydd. He studied under Saint Illtud, was ordained and then spent 10 years with Paulinus who also had been Illtud's pupil and a contemporary of St. Gildas.



One day David was invited to sing to the people living in Vallis Rossina. It was late in the year and very cold and in order to keep the people warm, David built a big bonfire. The smoke from the fire rose high into the air. An Irish Chieftain, named Boga, who was hunting with his men, looked up and saw a huge cloud of smoke drifting over head. Look up, men called Boga. Do you see that smoke? Can you see that it is in the form of a man's face? When Boga's wife heard about the cloud of smoke, she said Boga, you must go and kill the man who made the fire as no man can be greater than you. So Boga, with some of his men, set out to kill David. Having reached down David, they were about to kill him when a strange fever engulfed them, causing them to shiver uncontrollably and therefore were unable to harm David. David said go on your way in peace. You are not meant to harm me. When Boga returned home he was met by his wife. A terrible thing had happened she cried, all our sheep and cattle have died. Boga and his wife went to Vallis Rossina to seek out David. Please take pity on us they pleaded. Pray rescue our animals to life and you shall live in peace. When Boga and his wife returned to Ireland, they found all their animals alive and healthy.



David Finds A Monastery At Glyn Rhosyn

David founded a monastery at Glyn Rhosyn (Villa Rossina / Rose Vale) on the banks of the small river Alun where the cathedral city of St. David stands today. The monastic brotherhood that David founded was strict, with the brothers having to work very hard. They celebrated early morning mass and then cultivated and ploughed the land. Many crafts were taught, bee-keeping in particular was very important. The monks had to feed themselves as well as many pilgrims and travellers seeking refuge. They also had to feed and clothe the poor in their neighbourhood.

There are many stories regarding David's life. The bees on the farm were cared for by Ododomoc. One day he set off on a journey to Ireland taking a message from David to Boga. He headed for the coast where the ship was anchored. About a mile down the road, he thought he heard a buzzing sound. He looked over his right shoulder to see a swarm of bees. Ody goodness, he said they're the bees from the monastery. I will have to turn around and go back.

With the bees safely in the hives he set off once again. Soon the bees followed him again. This happened three times. The third time he went to David and asked, What am I to do with this swarm of bees which keep following me? David counselled him to the bees and said Go with Ododomoc and prosper in your new land. From that day, it is said, that Ireland has been rich in bees and honey.

St. David's emblem is a dove, the bird of peace. Legend has it that St. David instructed Welsh soldiers to wear leeks in their hats in a battle against the Saxons, so they could distinguish their own troops from that of their enemies.

The daffodil or leek lily originated with the lily of France, as Welsh soldiers are thought to have brought it back after taking part in the French battles of Henry V.



Born:
c.520 Menevia, St. Non's Bay (now St. David's, Wales)
Died:
c.601 Cdyngyu, Wales
Canonized:
1120 by Pope Callistus II
Name meaning:
Beloved One
Emblems:
Dove, Leek, Daffodil, (Wales, Welsh flag).
Representation:
Celtic Bishop with long hair and beard. A dove perched on his shoulder. Preaching on a hill, covered in daffodils, holding his cathedral.

David Spent A Short Period Of His Life, Travelling In The Holy Land

David spent a short period of his life, travelling in the Holy Land. He visited Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem. On his return to Wales a great meeting, which included all the Welsh bishops, was held at Llandudoch-Breth. It is said, David was so humble that he refused three times to attend the Synod of Breth. The Synod may have been called to counter a revival of the so-called Pelagian heresy named after the fifth century monk, Pelagius, who dismissed the idea of original sin and the consequent need for redemption. Eventually Paulinus suggested sending two saints, Deiniol and Dyfrig, to persuade David to come. It is said that when David addressed the Synod, a snow white dove descended from heaven to sit on his shoulder, while the ground on which he stood was miraculously raised into a hill so that he could be better seen and heard. Unsurprisingly, it was decided, very shortly afterwards, that David would be archbishop.

David's eloquence was such that he was pressed to become primate of the Welsh church, an office he only accepted on condition that the primatial seat be moved to Cdyngyu. This may have been an act of prudence, for the traditional seat at Caerleon on the river Usk, was much further east and exposed to the risk of pagan incursions from England.

David travelled far on his missionary journeys through Wales, where he established several churches. He also travelled to the south and west of England and Cornwall, as well as Brecon. In 731, the great English churchman and historian, Bede, wrote that David is credited with founding religious centres at Glasconbury and Croylund. Bede, however claimed that the Welsh had no desire to Christianize the pagan English; subsequently, this task was left mainly to the Irish missionaries and later to Saint Augustine. He attracted pupils from many walks of life, including retired monks like St. Conserantine of Dumnonia.

Legend has it that at the time David died in Cdyngyu about 601, the sun shone brilliantly on his mourners as he uttered his final words 'Noble brothers and sisters, be joyful and keep the faith and persevere in the little things you have heard and learnt together with me'. David's body was buried in the grounds of his own monastery, where the Cathedral of St. David now stands. John of Glasconbury informs us that in the reign of King Cadfan in the year 962, the relics of St. David were transferred, with great solemnity, from the vale of Ross to Glasconbury, together with a portion of the relics of St. Stephen, the first martyr. After his death, his influence spread far and wide.

St. David's Day, As Celebrated Today, Dates Back To 1120

St. David's Day, as celebrated today, dates back to 1120, when David was canonised by Pope Callistus II, and from the early 12th century, the church named after him at Ty Dewi (St. David's) became a place of pilgrimage. Pope Callistus declared that two pilgrimages to St. David's equalled in merit one visit to Rome. Three visits to St. David's equalled one to Jerusalem itself!!! In 1398, Archbishop Anselm ordained that March 1st, the feast day of St. David, be kept by every church in the province of Concorbury. Signified by the wearing of a leek (some wear a daffodil, it is solemnly celebrated by Welsh people all over the world). For many centuries, St. David's remained one of the most important and most visited sacred places in the whole of the British Isles. Even the Norman overlord of the whole of Britain, William The Conqueror, went to St. David's to worship. To this day, St. David is a very important figure to the Welsh. Naturally, then, St. David's Day is a time of great celebration in Wales. Societies all over Wales celebrate with special meetings and events.



St. David's Monastery Has Suffered The Ravages Of Time And Human Folly

St. David's monastery has suffered the ravages of time and human folly. The cathedral building itself, the largest and most impressive among its Welsh counterparts, sits in a hollow (Glen Rhosyn) through which runs the river Alun. It is believed by many that the placing of the cathedral was to hide it from the Viking raiders as it cannot be seen from the sea. However, the founding of the religious settlement dates back much later than the time of the Normans.

In 1088, despite the secluded, half hidden situation, the little settlement suffered the indignity of being ransacked by Vikings, raiding up and down the Welsh coast at will at various times in later years it also suffered piecemeal damage from earthquakes. No traces remain from the early founding, however much of the present church dates back only to 1180. Less than forty years later, the central tower collapsed, destroying the transepts and choir which were later re-built.

Bishop Gower (1320-1342), the remains of whose magnificent palace can be visited on the cathedral grounds, added much to the church, including decorated windows and part of the restored central tower. He is also responsible for the magnificent rood screen and is buried inside the church.



During the English civil war, Cromwell's troops were busy in their usual iconoclastic manner, destroying much of the cathedral and its contents and it was necessary for rebuilding programmes to be undertaken by John Nash in the late 18th century and by Sir Gilbert Scott in the 19th. Neither architect was able to do much about the slope in the floor which rises 14 feet from the west door up to the high altar (local legend says the slope was deliberately planned to get the congregation nearer to heaven).

The entrance to the cathedral is through an impressive, ruined gateway and down a steep flight of stone steps known locally as the 39 ascicles. The cathedral contains the shrines of St. Caradog and St. Justinian as well as St. David (though the latter may not be buried there, according to recent scientific tests of the bones). It also houses one of the only surviving medieval bishops' thrones in Britain.

Edmund Tudor, father of Henry VII is also commemorated in St. David's by an impressive altar-comb. In addition to the remains of Bishop Gower's opulent residence, the cathedral grounds also contain the ruins of St. David's college, for secular priests, which John of Gaunt helped found in 1377. Bishop Gower built his palace in 1340; two hundred years later, another Bishop had the lead from the roof slowly scrapped away to provide donations for his five daughters - all of whom married later Bishops!

The area of the cathedral, also includes the ruined chapel and holy well of St. Non, reputed to be David's mother. The well was an important place of pilgrimage for many centuries; its supposed healing powers were second only to those at St. Winifred's at Holywell in North Wales.

Perhaps as we go through life, we should remember St. David's last words, "Do the little things"